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DE RUEHLM #0529/01 1341121
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O 141121Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9976
INFO RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1183
RUEHHT/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 0257
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3830
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1666
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 8668
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 6903
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4969
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3034
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 4930
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4036
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 9292
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6598
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 1137
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3519
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CDRUSARPAC FT SHAFTER HI//APCW/APOP//
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J3/J332/J52//

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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA (BOUCHER), SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS USAID
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN, KSHEIN)
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (MORRISP, ACONVERY, RTHAYER, RKERR)
ATHENS FOR PCARTER
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER)
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA AND POL (SBERRY)
GENEVA FOR RMA (NKYLOH, NHILGERT, MPITOTTI)
USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)
SECDEF FOR OSD - POLICY
PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: Northern Sri Lanka SitRep 72

REF: A) Colombo 522 B) Colombo 519 C) Colombo 514 D) Colombo 507 E)
Colombo 501 F) Colombo 492 G) Colombo 484 H) Colombo 477 I) Colombo
470 J) Colombo 469 K) Colombo 464 and previous

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Charge pressed Government officials to permit UN access to the conflict zone as soon as possible, and to facilitate a visit this month by UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon. At least 1,200 civilians escaped on May 14, and perhaps thousands of others are following, according to military sources. The ICRC has not been able to offload food from or evacuate patients to boats waiting offshore from the conflict zone since May 9 despite daily attempts to seek security assurances as boats wait offshore. Both the LTTE and the Government noted appreciation for President Obama's May 13 public statement on Sri Lanka. President Rajapaksa established a Task Force to attend to IDP returns, rehabilitation, and development of the North within the next year. END SUMMARY.

ICRC Update

12. (SBU) ICRC has been in negotiations with senior Sri Lankan officials about conditions that would enable the ICRC-flagged "Green Ocean" to deliver food and evacuate passengers today, May 14. No agreement has yet been reached on a landing point acceptable to the military and the LTTE, nor have security guarantees been provided. ICRC emphasized in its discussions with both sides that firing must be halted in the area of the landing point, as otherwise patients being evacuated would be placed at risk. Humanitarian staff on the

ICRC-flagged "Green Ocean" could see explosions in the general vicinity of the landing point. Meanwhile, a larger ICRC-flagged ship "Oriental Planet" loaded with 500 metric tons of food was also waiting offshore. A two-day window of no firing would be required to off-load the ship. Note: As of afternoon on May 14, contacts report that the two ships remain 3 to 5 nautical miles offshore of the safe zone and cannot approach due to lack of security.

Charge Presses GSL on Early UN Visit

¶ 13. (SBU) In a May 14 conversation with Senior Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa, Charge pressed the Government to receive UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon as early as possible and to grant the UN access to the safe zone to expedite getting food and medicine in and civilians out. Basil responded that the President told the Secretary General on May 13 that he would welcome a visit but would be in Jordan May 14-18, so encouraged him to come later in the month. Charge responded that the UN should be granted access to the safe zone urgently and this could not wait until late May. Separately, Tourism Minister Milinda Moragoda, who was with Rajapaksa when he talked to the Secretary General, told Charge that the President explained to the Secretary General that he wanted to be able to offer him something concrete during a visit and "we don't have that yet."

UN UPDATE

¶ 14. (SBU) A UN contact said new imagery dated May 10 indicates the

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number of shelters has dropped from 11,300 on May 6 to 7,000 on May 10. The move to the south and southwest may have been without shelters, possibly explaining the difference. The UN has no reports of incoming artillery since Tuesday (but there was intense mortar fire on April 13, including two mortar shells which landed near the makeshift hospital, ref A). Medical personnel have had a hard time reaching casualties because the fighting is getting so close, reportedly within 500 meters. The UN said there were now 5,000 civilians at Pulmoddai. The military is conducting twice-weekly convoys on the A-9 to Jaffna, one for logistics and one for personnel. The UN source noted that according to the World Health Organization, cases of chicken pox in the IDP camps have increased from 600 in February to over 8,000 at present.

MILITARY REPORTS CIVILIAN ESCAPES

¶ 15. (SBU) Army contacts reported that 58 Division advanced southward another 500m southward along the coast to a point about one kilometer north of the ICRC's landing site. On the lagoon side, 53 Division is generally on line with 58 Division. 53 Division has reached some paddy fields, an open terrain area where its soldiers have been targeted by LTTE snipers. In the south, 59 Division made little significant progress last night, May 13. It controls 400-500m of the southern LTTE ditch-cum-bund along the northern shore of the lagoon outlet and has advanced about 300m north along the coast. There were no LTTE counterattacks last night, though LTTE mortar fire intensified appreciably. The Army estimates the LTTE has about 1,000 cadres under arms, 400-500 hardcore and as many as 600 auxiliaries and forced recruits. The LTTE is recruiting on a daily basis. According to the Army, approximately 360 civilians crossed over to Government-controlled territory on May 13 and 300 as of midday May 14, mostly south to 59 Division but some north to 58 Division as well. Civilians are slipping through gaps in the LTTE lines and in some cases, LTTE cadres may be allowing their own family members to leave. The Defense Ministry website announced that over 1,000 civilians escaped toward the 59 Division last night, May 13, and an additional 200-250 fled northward to 53 and 58 Divisions.

¶ 16. (SBU) A Navy contact said the Army is making continued progress against LTTE positions. There were no Sea Tiger-Sri Lankan Navy engagements on May 13-14. The LTTE now control only 1.5-2.5 kilometers of coastline. One boatload of civilians escaped

southward along the coast. They waited till Sea Tiger patrol boats moved away, then made a break for it.

¶7. (SBU) An Air Force contact said UAV footage taken early afternoon on May 14 showed that about 2,000 civilians had already followed the eastern shore of the lagoon south and swam across the outlet to 59 Division. A short time later UAV coverage showed 2,500-3,000 more moving along the same route. The contact reports 300 civilians swam across the Nanthi Kadal lagoon last night, May 13. A large group of civilians tried to move north along the beach towards 58 Division but ran back after the LTTE started shooting at them. The Sri Lankan Air Force was trying to convince the Ministry of Defense to release the UAV video. The Sri Lankan Air Force contact said the LTTE has made up for its battlefield losses by forcibly recruiting

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the young and old, giving them weapons, and assigning a hardcore LTTE to every 20-30 forced recruits.

LTTE and GSL WELCOME POTUS STATEMENT

¶8. (U) Both the Government and the LTTE made statements of appreciation for President Obama's May 13 statement regarding Sri Lanka. The LTTE thanked the President "for passionately talking about the plight of Tamil civilians and calling for urgent actions to alleviate the mounting humanitarian crisis." The LTTE comments ignored the President's criticism of LTTE abuses, particularly holding civilians as human shields. Senior Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa contacted Charge on behalf of President Rajapaksa to note appreciation for the President's "encouraging message".

ARMY LOCATES LTTE AIRCRAFT ACCESSORIES

¶9. (SBU) The Defense Ministry reported discovery of LTTE aircraft accessories in Puthukkudiyiruppu on May 13. The items buried in a coconut grove include four cylinder engines, three propellers, an aircraft radio set, five aircraft main wheels, three nose wheels, four pilots' hand phones, battery charges, digital meters, computer graphic manuals, ground marshalling torches, flying (aerial) computers, flying simulation units, 23 runway lights, head lights, transmitters, marine radars, flying maps, 35 high-speed boat engines, a water scooter laden with explosives, and an aircraft towing carrier.

NEW TASK FORCE FOR THE NORTH

¶10. (SBU) On May 13, President Mahinda Rajapaksa announced establishment of a 19-member Presidential Task Force for Resettlement, Development and Security in the Northern Province. This new committee, chaired by Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa, is charged with implementing all Government efforts in the North. Commissioner General for Essential Services S.B. Divarathne was appointed as Secretary; Ministers or Secretaries from relevant line ministries are represented. The President has ordered this Task Force to complete its mandate and report to the President within one year.

ONE YEAR OR THREE?

¶11. (SBU) NGO staff who visited Vavuniya and met with authorities on May 8-9 report they received guidance from a Government official that the IDP camps are being set up with the expectation that civilians will be housed there for 2 to 3 years. This contradicts recent Government declarations that it will expedite the resettlement of civilians to the North and return 80% by the end of calendar year 2009.

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: The North has been emptied of civilians as Government forces have recaptured land. Donors do not agree with the long-term confinement of civilians, over 190,000 of whom are

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currently in sites ringed by multiple rows of concertina wire and who have no freedom of movement. UNHCR, the UN lead for protection matters, communicated to the Government on multiple occasions its expectations of full freedom of movement for civilians following timely screening for combatants; however as of yet, no organization or donor has taken the decision to withhold life-saving assistance. Debate on this issue is expected to intensify once the conflict in Mullaitivu ends and international attention shifts to the IDP camps.

MOORE